Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins

A SHORT SKETCH OF HER LIFE & WORK.

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A short sketch of her life and work

The life of Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins is full of inspiration for those who study it. Hers is a life of varigated experiences and achievements. She was born in Ireland in the year 1878 and matriculated with distinction in 189[illegible] from the Londonderry Girls' High School after completing a scholarship course. Later on she passed in her First Arts and specialised in a course of music, attending the Royal Irish Academy of music and winning scholarships and medals. She joined as a music teacher in the first Kindergarten School opened in Dublin. In 1902, she took the examination of the Royal University of Ireland and became a Bachelor of Music. She married in 1903. The years from 1906 to 1913, she gave to the founding of the Irish Women Franchise League,

of which she was a founder. She was its Honorary Treasurer and one of its prominent speakers and campaigners. She was imprisoned in England and Ireland during the woman suffrage agitation.

It was in November 1915, Mrs. M.E. Cousins first came out to India with her husband. In the publishing office of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, she gained valuable experience. In 1916 she was elected as the first non-Indian member of the Indian Women's University in Poona. Between 1916 and 1921, she helped in the teaching work of the Madanapalle Theosophical College. It was she who started the forerunner of the Women's Indian Association in Madanapalle where she conducted afternoon classes for women in English, Handicrafts and Domestic Science. Ultimately it became the model of the Women's Indian Association, of which she became one of the Joint Secretaries and for years the editor of its monthly journal "Stri Dharma". For one year between 1919 and 1920 she acted as Principal of the National Girls' School, Mangalore. In 1926 she became one of the original founders of the All-India Women's Conference, and was undoubtedly one of the makers of that great

institution. She was largely responsible for organising the first session of the All-India Women's Conference in Poona in 1927. To quote from a report of the All-India Women's Conference, "The All-India Women's Conference owes its origin to a circular letter from Mrs. Margaret E. Cousins, who in the autumn of 1926 as the Secretary of the Women's Indian Association, Adyar, Madras, addressed an appeal to women all over the country to form local committees and hold constituent conferences in each of the provinces and in certain districts and Indian States for the purpose of declaring their views on problems of education." Between the years 1923 and 1928 Mrs. Cousins proved to be a dynamic force in the cause of Indian women. She organised the Women's Home of Service, Madras, for child welfare service and for giving vocational training to women. This Home which was started in 1923 represented the Social Service side of the work of the Women's Indian Association and contained in the germ the present Seva Sadan. It was chiefly through the efforts of this Association that compulsory education for girls in Madras was introduced, on the same terms as boys, the Madras Children's Act was enforced, the Children's Aid

Society came in to existence and Indian women were induced to visit jails and hospitals and to take interest in Maternity and Child Welfare work. The Association also supported social reform measures such as the Saradha Act, the Age of Consent Bill etc., in the legislature through meetings and vigorous propaganda. It secured for Indian women the franchise on the same terms as men and the right to sit in the legislature. Madras, under Mrs. Cousins' lead, was the first in having a woman appointed as a member of the legislature. A suggestion that Mrs. Cousins should be the first woman member of the Madras Legislative Council was declined by her on the ground that such a distinction belonged rightly to an Indian woman. Mrs. Cousins was one of those who brought into existence the Lady Irwin Domestic Science College, Delhi. Much of this work was accomplished during the period when Mrs. Cousins was Secretary of the Women's Indian Association and Editor of the magazine 'Stri Dharma.' It was Mrs. Cousins who in 1917 organised a deputation of women to wait on the Secretary of State for India which made the first demand for women's suffrage in India. Madras was the first to grant votes for women and other provinces

soon followed its example. In 1923, Mrs. Cousins became the first woman in India to be appointed as an Honorary Magistrate. In 1928, she was one of the deputation of women who met the President of the League of Nations in Geneva to demand the holding of the Disarmament Conference. In a world-tour and a year's residence in America she lectured widely on women in India. In 1930-31 she helped to organise the first All-Asian Women's Conference. In 1932, she made an individual protest against the forcing of emergency Ordinances into the ordinary Penal Code and was given a year's imprisonment. Between 1933 and 1934, she was as usual active in the cause of Indian women and children. At Kotagiri in the Nilgiris, where she stayed, she created a Child Welfare and Maternity Centre. It was here that she became ill in 1943. Happily she is recovering, though with the slowness characteristic of semi-paralysis.

The women of India owe a profound debt of gratitude to Mrs. M. E. Cousins who, though born and brought up in Ireland, made herself completely one with the women of India and who has served them as perhaps no other woman in the present

time. It is our fervent prayer to God that she may be spared for many more years of vigorous physical and mental life for the service of the cause which is so dear to herself and to all of us.

(This Brochure is published by the friends and admirers of Mrs. E. Cousins, who greatly value her life and service.)

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